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FM AMEMBASSY COLOMBO
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6293
INFO RUEHRL/AMEMBASSY BERLIN PRIORITY 0467
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA PRIORITY 0216
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD PRIORITY 7199
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU PRIORITY 5306
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 3846
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DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/INS
MCC FOR D NASSIRY AND E BURKE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/12/2017
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [PHUM](#) [MOPS](#) [CE](#)
SUBJECT: IRAN DELAYS APPROVAL OF NEW COLOMBO PLAN HEAD

REF: COLOMBO 836

Classified By: Ambassador Robert O. Blake, Jr., for reasons 1.4(b,d).

¶1. (C) On June 18, the Colombo Plan Council held a special session to confirm the nomination of Malaysian candidate Patricia Yoon-Moi Chia as the new Secretary-General. Chia had been selected by the Colombo Plan Selection Committee on June 11 (ref) from a short-list of four candidates.

¶2. (C) Iranian Ambassador Benham Behrouz, however, chose not to endorse Chia during yesterday's session citing concerns about the selection process. Behrouz, who was accompanied by Iranian attach Mohsen Ataelahi, argued that there was a lack of transparency in the selection process and wanted to know what criteria were used to short-list the candidates. Behrouz emphasized that he did not object to Chia individually, nor did he dispute the judgment of the selection committee. Behrouz was dissatisfied with the response given by current Colombo Plan President and Pakistani Ambassador Shahzad A. Chaudhry, who argued that the process cannot be changed after-the-fact. Following a brief recess and a private conversation between Chaudhry and Behrouz, the President chose to delay the official nomination until Behrouz consulted Tehran. The remaining members in attendance endorsed Chia.

¶3. (C) Ambassador spoke with Chaudhry later who said he has asked the Iranians to consider the needs of the organization and not delay the process further. He has given Iran a week to make its position clear. Chaudhry noted there were no procedural grounds for Iran to object to the exclusion of their candidate. He commented that if the Iranians continue to block consensus after a week, he will consult with Ambassador and others. "We can't let Iran hijack the process," he said, even if it means changing the constitution.
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